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Voices for Equity Minority and Majority in South Asia

RINDAS
The Center for the Study of Contemporary India, Ryukoku University
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Ambedkar-Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh (1951-2001): An Analysis of Demographic, Social, Economic and Political Developments

Shiv Shankar Das

Dr. Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), a vigorous advocate of Buddhism in modern India, triggered off a wave of the revival of Buddhism all over the country. He declared, while speaking in a Yeola conference (Nasik) in 1935, that he was born as a Hindu but would not die as a Hindu.[1] In October 1956, on the occasion of 2500th birth anniversary of Gautam Buddha, he fulfilled this promise by embracing Buddhism with his millions of followers in Nagpur (Maharashtra) in the ceremony called *Dhamma Deeksha.*[2] After studying all the religions of the world, he considered Buddhism as the best option for the emancipation of the depressed classes. Ultimately, the religious dilemma of the untouchables was solved with his resolution of 1956 by embracing Buddhism with additional twenty two vows. Ambedkar enlightened the depressed community by introducing them with India's glorious egalitarian past founded on the rich cultural history of Buddhism based on equality which was absolutely in contrast with the existing dynamics of brahminical social order based on hierarchical caste-system. On 24th May 1956, in his first public declaration in Bombay to embrace Buddhism in October 1956, he briefed the core difference of Buddhism from Hinduism on the subject of God, soul and caste-system. In his own words, *"Hinduism believes in God. Buddhism has no God. Hinduism believes in soul. According to Buddhism there is no soul. Hinduism believes in Chaturvarna and the caste system. Buddhism has no place for the Caste System and Chaturvarna."*[3]

For him, a successful political system of India will be dependent on Buddhist principles of associated-life and caste-less and class-less society rather than merely a functional government. In his own words, *"The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society"*.[4] Thus, he views democracy and Buddhism as complimentary to each other.[5]

With Ambedkar's conversion, all over the country there was an exodus of depressed castes

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1. See Hari Narake, N. G. Kamble, Dr. M. L. Kasare, Ashok Godghate, ed., *BAWS*, Vol. 17(3), *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution: Speeches*, by Dr. Ambedkar (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 2003), 95. The similar willing is found in his undelivered speech 'Annihilation of Caste'(1937) which he was suppose to deliver in Arya Samaj's Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal but could not permitted due to containing in it his 'voice' in favour of conversion.

2. Ambedkar's idea of Deeksha ceremony was mandatory aspect of conversion. As he said in one of his letter "*Everyone who wishes to be converted to Buddhism shall have to undergo through ceremony. Otherwise he will not be regarded as a Buddhist."* See. Hari Narake, N. G. Kamble, Dr. M. L. Kasare, Ashok Godghate, ed., *BAWS*, Vol. 17(1), *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution: Struggle for Human Rights*, by Dr. Ambedkar (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 2003), p 430.

3. See Hari Narake, N. G. Kamble, Dr. M. L. Kasare, Ashok Godghate, ed., *BAWS*, Vol. 17(3), *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution: Speeches*, (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 2003), p 517.

4. See Hari Narake, N. G. Kamble, Dr. M. L. Kasare, Ashok Godghate, ed., *BAWS*, Vol. 17(3), *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution: Speeches*, (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 2003), p 519.

5. For details see *BAWS*, 17, 3, pp 406-409.

from Hinduism in a very large number and they started asserting Buddhism as their religion in the census data. A miraculous growth of 1671% of Buddhists in India over the figure of 1,80,823 as it rose to 32,50,227 in 1961 census has never been seen in the known history of any religion in the world.[6] According to an eminent Buddhist scholar of modern India D. C. Ahir, the post 1956 period is the period of revival of Buddhism with intense activity which can aptly be called as *"Ambedkar Era of Indian Buddhism"*.[7] It signifies that Buddhism without prefixing 'Ambedkar' cannot be studied in modern Indian sociologically.[8] Yet, in the censuses it is mentioned only Buddhism and not as Ambedkar Buddhism or Neo-Buddhism so the category "Buddhism" is used here when dealing with census data.

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in India and has a significant place in Indian polity. The population data of the world tells that out of 41 persons, one person belongs to Uttar Pradesh. According to 2001 census, with the population of 166197921, Uttar Pradesh is more than many countries of the world except the population of China, US, Indonesia, Brazil and Russian Republic.[9] Out of this huge population the scheduled castes population constitutes 22% (Census 2001). Uttar Pradesh is also the second largest state-economy in India contributing 8.17% to India's total GDP Between 2004 and 2009.[10] In Indian politics, religious conversion has always been a matter of importance, conflict and violence. The change of religious identities has triggered many political debates. The change in identity by a group adds or subtracts a community's number which is very important in democracy.

Traditionally, the scheduled caste (earlier treated as untouchables) community has been the most backward community of Uttar Pradesh in terms of social and economic conditions. To overcome this pathetic situation the community had in the history sometimes challenged the dominant Hindu social order. Kabir, Ravidas, Achhutanand etc. had been the symbols of voice of disadvantaged since centuries. In modern India the community was added with one more hero - Dr. Ambedkar who fought for their rights constitutionally, socially, culturally and politically. His ideals and vision are of much importance for the empowerment of socially neglected, politically subjugated, culturally destroyed and economically exploited community. As it is well known that one of the visions of Dr. Ambedkar was to empower the depressed castes and to transform India into *Prabudha Bharat* (Enlightened India), where the Buddhist values liberty, equality, fraternity and justice would prevail. The conversion drive to Buddhism in 1956 was certainly a move towards this goal. The respect for the philosophy of Ambedkar is very much evident in increasing number of Buddhist population. It seems that in U.P there is no politics possible without keeping Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism in the front.

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6. See D.C. Ahir, *Buddhism in India after Dr. Ambedkar (1956-2002)* (New Delhi: Blumoon Books, 2003), p 40.

7. Ibid.

8. In press conference on 13th October 1956 Ambedkar responding to one correspondent used the word *Navayana* to which he converted next day. Though the word *Navayana* is dubbed as Neo-Buddhism by some academicians which is a subject of the contestant among its followers objecting its prefix 'Neo'. See David Pandyan, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Dynamics of Neo-Buddhism* (New Delhi: Gyan Pub. House, 1996), 201-202. The 'Neo' means, 'new', 'later', revived in modified form', and based upon. (See. Collins English Dictionary, 1998 Ed.) Here the purpose is not to discuss the linguistic problems in the words. Here the prefix 'Ambedkar' suits the clearer meaning which had been used by Timothy Fitzgerald in his writings (For example Ambedkar-Buddhism In Maharashtra, *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, July,1997 (31) no.2. pp 225-251).

9. Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Viewed on 26 December 2010. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar_Pradesh).

10. Ibid.

1. Demographic Development of Buddhist Community in Uttar Pradesh

According to the present boundary of Uttar Pradesh, in 1951 census the total Buddhist population was 2517. The twelve districts of Uttar Pradesh then had no Buddhist population, thirteen districts had less than two digit and nowhere four digit number was in total 46 districts. But, in every subsequent census there is a notable upsurge.

Table 1. Composition of Uttar Pradesh Population

Census Year	Total Population	Buddhists
1951	60693755	2517
1961	70640045	10478
1971	84539184	35056
1981	106016301	47573
1991	132061753	208583
2001	166197921	302031

Source: Census of India data on Uttar Pradesh 1951-2001.

Table 2. Buddhist Population Growth 1951-2001 Area-wise

Area/Division	1951-1961	1961-1971	1971-1981	1981-1991	1991-2001
Agra	4576	11343	17109	43044	60624
Allahabad	860	5130	4822	11915	23924
Banaras	553	580	1816	20358	34988
Faizabad	111	103	404	12594	23570
Gorakhpur	202	289	1302	37768	58724
Jhansi	188	1847	1919	12327	7568
Lucknow	350	1708	10139	37422	48512
Merrut	2464	11819	7365	17664	16448
Rohilkhand	1174	2327	2697	15491	27673
Total	10478	35146	47573	208583	302031

Sources: Census data on Uttar Pradesh 1951-2001.

As we know there are few changes in geographical boundary of Uttar Pradesh. For example, Uttaranchal has been carved out in 2000, so the population of that geographically area is deducted not only from 2000 onwards but since 1951 and only the existing geographically area is being taken into account which is presented and analysed. The available divisions in 1951 are kept as a base and later on created divisions are amalgamated within these. The detailed study of increasing Buddhist numbers can be studied census wise.

1.1 Census 1961

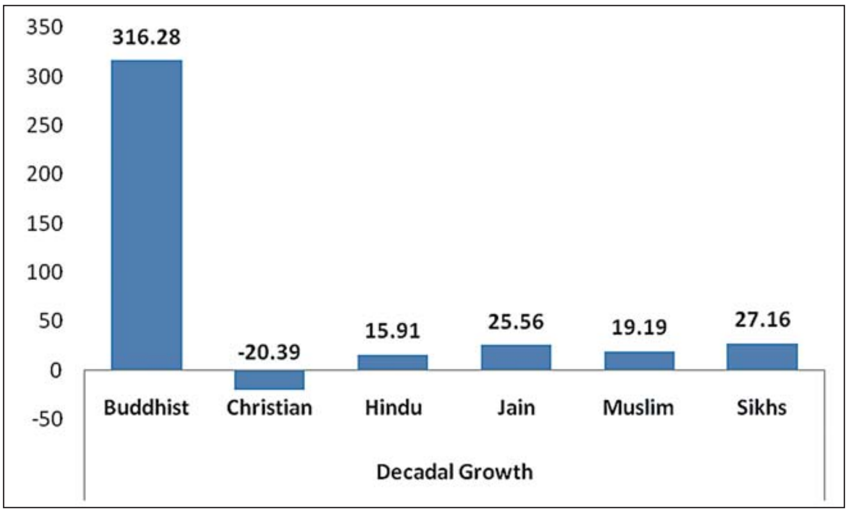
Uttar Pradesh has been the cradle of Buddhism in ancient Indian history. The religion of rulers and masses declined from the land of its birth, and was reduced to only 2517 people (0.004% of total population of state) in 1951. Before the strengthening of Buddhism in the decade of 1950's, it had become completely extinct in twelve of its prominent districts.[11]

11. In the districts Gonda (Plus Balrampur), Sultanpur, Barabanki, Kheri, Sitapur, Unnao, Azamgarh, Basti (plus Siddharth Nagar and Sant Kabir Nagar), Mirzapur (plus Sonbhadra), Rampur, Pilibhit and Shahjahanpur is

The eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh which were once the main centres of Buddhism lost its charm due to some adverse situations like the removal of the political patronage since sixth century[12] and antagonism of Brahmanism. In the reign of Mauryas and Kaniskas the Buddhist art and culture was at its zenith which reduced to the lowest by 20th century. The documents of Chinese scholar Hiuen Tsang presents mesmerizing picture of Buddhism during his visit in the 5th century A.D. According to him there were 30 monasteries and many stupas of Buddhist art and architecture. Sarnath and Shravasti have been very reverent places not only for the Buddhists of Uttar Pradesh but also for the Buddhists across the world. The other Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hian who visited Uttar Pradesh in the 7th Century A.D. and Wu-Kung in eighth Century A.D demonstrates the Buddhist monuments during their ages.[13]

An upsurge, in the Buddhist population in large number is noted for the first time in 1961 census, especially in the western part of Uttar Pradesh like Agra, Meerut, Aligarh, Bareilly Bijnor and Pilibhit districts. The other important places of mass conversion are noted in Kanpur, Lucknow, and Mirjapur districts. Subsequently, the Buddhist population is recorded with a great leap in all parts of Uttar Pradesh. Eight of its twelve districts, where there was no representation in 1951 census, also recorded Buddhists population in large numbers in the later censuses. It shows that the dynamism of Buddhism is not confined to any specific area but its impact is everywhere.

Figure 1. Growth Rate of Religious Communities in U.P (Census 1961)



Sources: Census of India 1951 and 1961

In the census of 1961 the number of Buddhists multiplied fourfold and reached 10478 (0.014% of total population of U.P) with the splendid growth rate of 316.28% against overall growth rate of 16.38%. This splendid growth of Buddhists left behind all the religious communities like Christian (-20.39%), Hindu (15.91%), Jain (25.56%), Muslim (19.19%) and Sikhs (27.16%). The Hindu and Christian communities could not even manage average decadal growth rate (16.38).

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recorded no Buddhist population in 1951 census.

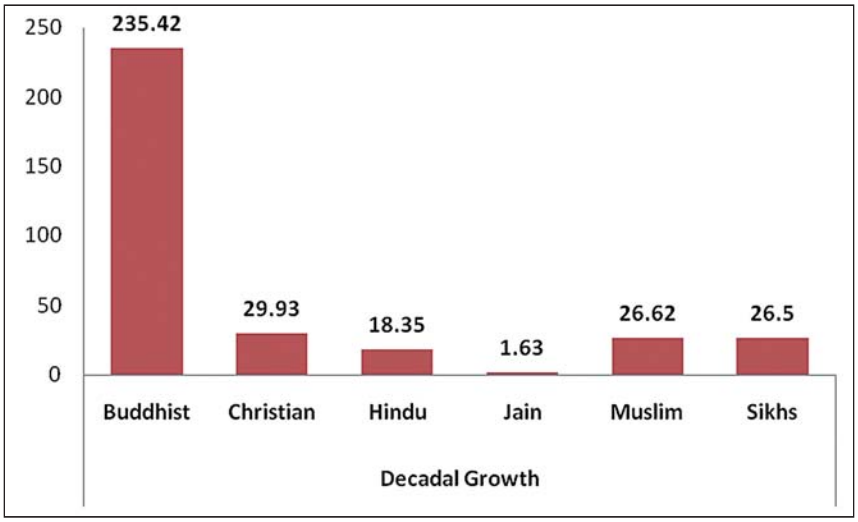
12. N. Dutt and K. D. Bajpai, *Development of Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh*, (Lucknow: Publication Bureau, Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1956), pp 308-326.

13. Ibid.

1.2 Census 1971

The 1971 census witnessed another great leap of Buddhism. In this decade the Buddhist population growth rate recorded was 235.42% against the total population growth rate of 19.64% only. The number of Buddhists jumped to 35,056 over the 10,478 in the previous census. One more noticeable thing in the development of Buddhism in 1971 census is increase in popularity and conversion to Buddhism in western and central part of Uttar Pradesh instead of eastern part which had been the centre of Buddhist teachings traditionally. The traditional prestigious centre of Buddhism such as Banaras, Kushinagar and Shravasti did not witness the wave of the revival in its splendid manner as happened in the western part of the state. The administrative divisions where the Buddhist population jumped miraculously in census of 1971 were Agra (11343), Meerut (11739), Allahabad (5130), Rohilkhand (2327) Jhansi (1847) and Lucknow (1708), while the Administrative divisions of eastern Uttar Pradesh such as Banaras (580), Gorakhpur (289) and Faizabad (103) could not even touch the thousand marks.

Figure 2. Growth Rate of Religious Communities of Uttar Pradesh in % (Census 1971)

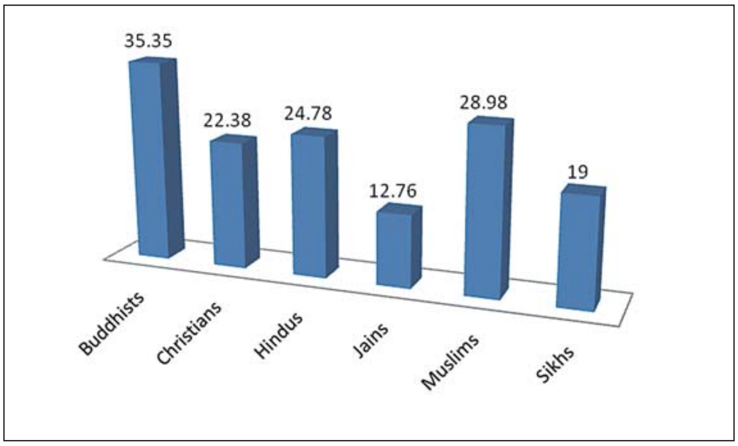


Sources: Census of India 1961 and 1971.

1.3 Census 1981

The census of 1981 showed the slowest growth rate of Buddhism (35.35%) since its revival in 1961 census. But even when compared to other religious communities, its growth rate surpassed all the other religious communities viz. Christian (22.38%), Hindu (24.78%), Jain (12.76%), Muslim (29.28%) and Sikh (19.00%).

Figure 3. Growth Rate of Major Religious Communities of Uttar Pradesh in % (Census 1981)



Sources: Census of India 1971 and 1981

The administrative divisions of eastern Uttar Pradesh where there was a slow progress in previous censuses recorded a remarkable jump in this decade. The divisions such as Banaras, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Faizabad touched the new heights by reaching to 1816, 1302, 10139, and 404 respectively. The decadal growth rate of Banaras, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Faizabad divisions is recorded as 213.10%, 350.51%, 493.61% and 292.23% respectively. The Agra division of western Uttar Pradesh only maintained a comparatively better growth rate in western Uttar Pradesh touching 50.83% against the overall Buddhist decadal growth rate of 35.35%. The administrative divisions where the growth rate of Buddhism was minimal are Rohilkhand (15.90%) and Jhansi (3.89%). The negative growth rate was recorded in Meerut and Allahabad with -37.26% and -6.00% respectively.

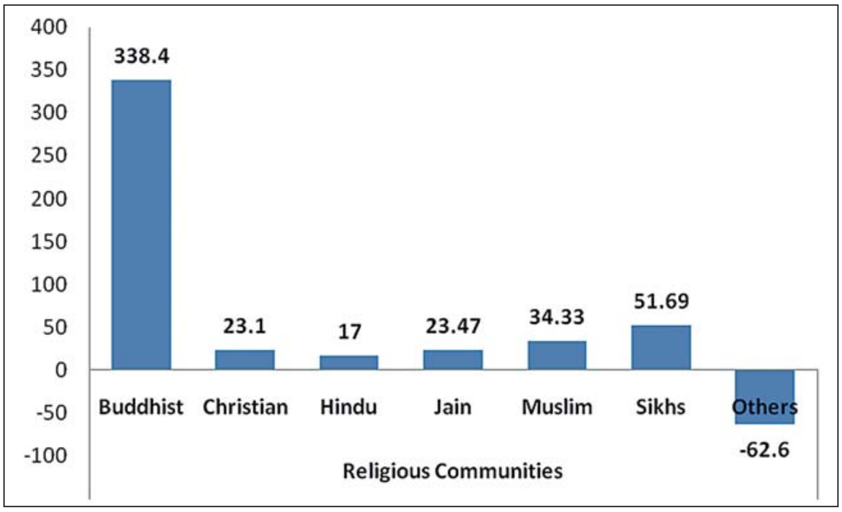
In the census of 1961 and 1971 Buddhism was seen taking new feet all over Uttar Pradesh. But the overall analysis of 1981 census is very important to know the causes for the slow progress of Buddhism in comparison with the previous censuses. A unique methodology was followed for during 1981 census. The figures of religion for 1961, 1971, 1991 and 2001 were based on the religion of every individual whereas the figures presented in 1981 were based on the religion of the head of the household. Thus, most probably, it seems that the slow growth rate of Buddhism was reported due to this factor. The argument behind this is that the conversion of untouchables is found mainly in new educated young people within a family and not by the chief of a household and their entire family.

1.4 Census 1991

In the census year of 1991 there was a splendid growth rate of Buddhist population. In the modern history of the revival of Buddhism, the census 1991 recorded the highest growth rate of Buddhists with 338.44%, while Hindu population growth rate was found at another nadir point with 17.03% against the overall population growth rate of 24.56%. The growth rate of Buddhists among all the divisions[14] of U.P in descending order recorded was Faizabad 3017.32%, Gorakhpur 2800.76%, Benaras 1021.03%, Jhansi 542.36%, Rohilkhand 474.37%, Lucknow 269.08%, Agra 151.58%, Allahabad 147.09% and Meerut 139.83%.

14. Though after 1951 census, there is much changing and creation of new administrative divisions but here for the purpose of easiness to study only the existing divisions of 1951 are taken as a base.

Figure 4. Growth Rates of Religious Communities of Uttar Pradesh (Census 1991)



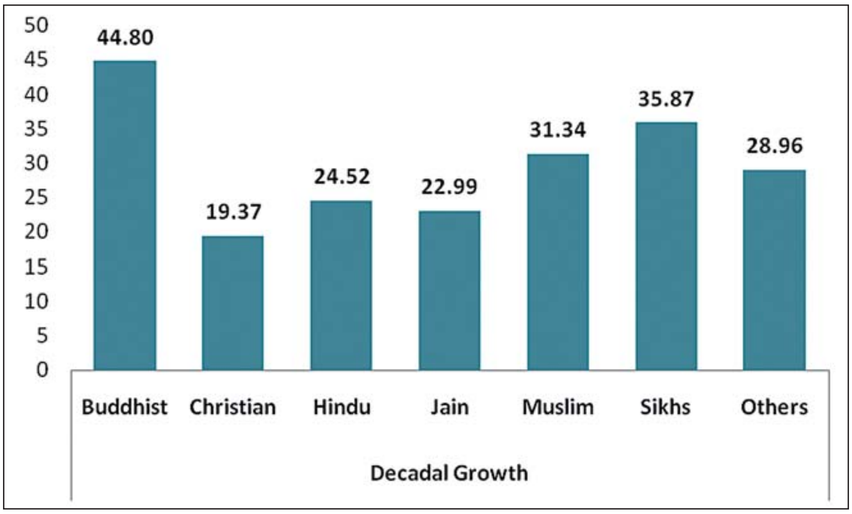
Source: Census of India 1981 and 1991

Figure 4 clearly shows the splendid vertical growth rate of Buddhism (338%), has no match with all the other communities such as Hindu (17%), Muslim (34%), Jain (23%), and Christian (23%) and Sikhs (51%).

1.5 Census 2001

During the last decade of 20th century, the average population growth of Uttar Pradesh was observed to be 25.84%, while the Buddhist population observed the growth rate of 44.80% which is the highest among all the religious communities.

Figure 5. Decadal Growth Rate of Religious Communities of Uttar Pradesh in% (Census 2001)



Sources: Census of India 1991 and 2001.

Though, it is true that the Buddhist growth rate was not observed as observed in the previous census but the number has definitely increased and established its importance in a splendid manner. The other communities in the decade which failed to touch even the average growth mark of 25.84% are Hindu 24.5%, Jain 22.9% and Christian 19.3%. The Allahabad division recorded the

highest growth rate of Buddhists with 100.78%, while the Hindu population grew only 24.5% here. The other divisions such as Faizabad, Rohilkhand, and Gorakhpur recorded Buddhist growth rate as 87.15%, 78.63% and 55.48% respectively. For details of the Buddhist population area wise, see table 2.

The divisions which recorded with less than overall percentage growth of Buddhists were Agra (40.84%), Lucknow (29.63%) and Meerut (6.88%). The negative Buddhist growth rate of -36.80% was recorded in Jhansi division. This was due to decrease of Buddhist population by 5447 in Jalaun district without any known reason till date. In Meerut division, Meerut District observed a fall in the population by 5012. Leaving these negatives it cannot be denied that the upsurge of Buddhist population in the Uttar Pradesh in 2001 census has touched its new zenith.

According to 2001 census the number of Buddhist population in Uttar Pradesh showed an unprecedented increase of 11899% over the 1951 figure of 2517 as it rose to 302031. The average growth rate of Buddhists between 1951-2001 noticed a whooping lead with 194.36% against very small average population growth rate of 22.37%.[15] The average growth rate of Buddhists during these fifty years surpassed all the religious communities with a huge margin Hindus 61.92%, Muslims 71.56%, Christians 48.31%, Jains 54.82% and Sikhs 77.79%. The trend of whooping growth rate shows that Buddhism is a matter of great public importance, and in democratic politics it is impossible to be missed out this phenomenon.

2. Social Indicators of the Buddhist Community in Uttar Pradesh

The census of India 2001 illustrates specific aspects like sex ratios and literacy of the religious communities. In literacy the Buddhist community is at the lowest except Muslims among all the religious communities, but is ahead than scheduled castes. The other aspects such as the participation of Buddhists in higher education are not available in census data or National Sample Survey Organisation etc. The other significant data that can be helpful is of National Family Health Survey but that too is not available at the state level. Being so tight handed we can only highlight the most important aspect of the Buddhists i.e. Literacy which is available in 2001 Census.

Literacy: It is for the first time in independent India that the census office has released data on literacy by religion in 2001. Literacy is an important indicator of social and human development which directly affects fertility as well as mortality, especially child mortality (sex ratios). As Buddhism is the largest growing religion with the conversion of scheduled castes on a large scale, the literacy rate of Buddhists is much better than the scheduled castes. When compared with the scheduled castes, Buddhists are in a little better position but if compared with other religious communities, it is lagging behind. The table 3 and figure 6 makes the point clear.

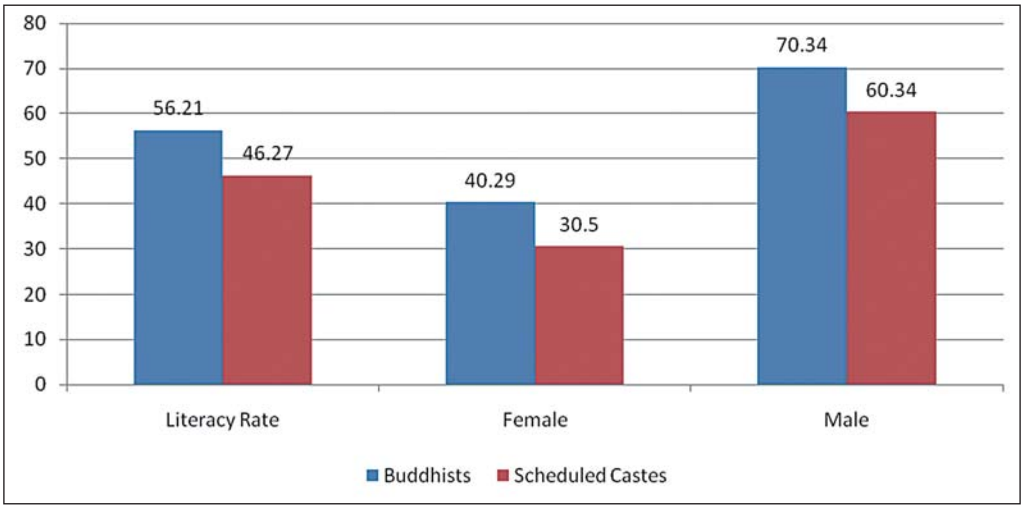
15. The data is calculated according to present boundary of Uttar Pradesh from 1951-2001 derived from the various census reports of Uttar Pradesh.

Table 3. Literacy Rate of the Religious Communities of U.P in %

Religious Communities	% Literacy
Buddhists	56.2
Christians	72.8
Hindus	58.0
Jains	93.2
Muslims	47.8
Sikhs	71.9
All	56.3

Source: Census of India 2001

Figure 6. Literacy Rate of Buddhists and Scheduled Castes of Uttar Pradesh in %



Source: Census of India 2001

From the table 3, it is clear that the literacy rate of Buddhists (56.2%) is better than Muslims only (47.8%) while other communities are noticed with high literacy rates like Jains (93.2%), Christians (72.8%), Sikhs (71.9%), and Hindus (58.00%). Figure 6 shows that the literacy rate of the scheduled castes is 46.27% while Buddhists are recorded with a better literacy rate of 56.21%.

3. Economic Condition of Buddhist Community in Uttar Pradesh

Economic condition is one of the most important variables for human survival. A community with sound economic base always has an upper hand in fields like politics and higher education. The economic characteristics of a particular community is calculated on the basis of the sector of economy they are engaged in, the nature of work they perform, employment status as to whether they are employers, employees, or independent workers and the status of their earning. In this regard, to know the economic status of Buddhist community in comparison with others we can take following element.

Workers' Activity Pattern: The workers activity is mainly divided into three sectors as primary, secondary and tertiary sector. On the basis of this classification we can analyze the extent of specialization and diversification of labour of a particular community. This is used as an indicator

of economic progress by the economists. The 2001 census provides with the data of workers on the basis of divisions such as Cultivators, Agricultural Labourers, Household Workers and Other Workers, on the basis of religion which is given in the table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Category of Workers by Religious Communities of Uttar Pradesh in%

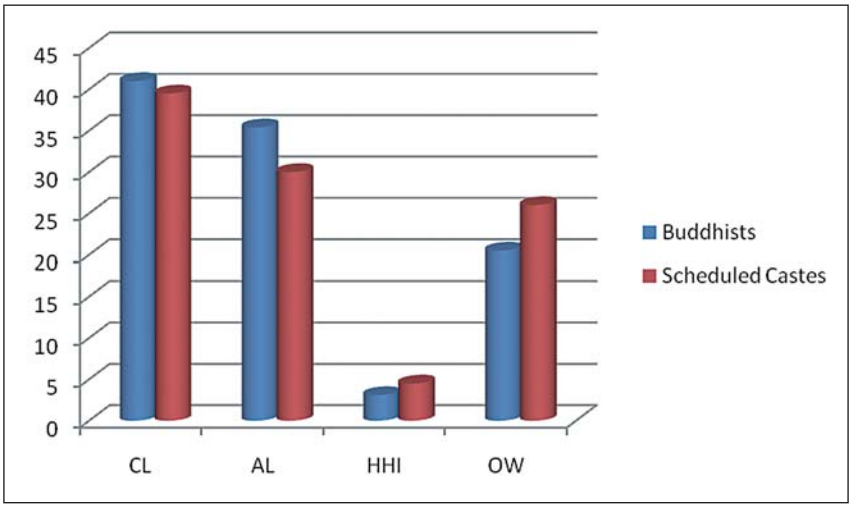
Category	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	Jain	Muslim	Sikhs
CL	41.0	14.8	44.2	5.0	25.7	51.3
AL	35.4	13.1	25.6	1.9	21.6	9.1
HHI	3.1	5.0	4.4	5.9	11.9	3.4
Others	20.5	67.1	25.9	87.2	40.7	36.2

Source: The First Report on Religion Data- Abstract, Census of India, 2001.

Abbreviations:
CL = Cultivators, engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from government, private or any institution.
AL = Agricultural Labourers, who works on another person's land for wages in money or kind.
HHI = Household Industry Workers, industry run by one or more members of the household at home or within village in rural area.
OW = Other Workers, who have been engage in some economic activity during the last one year like workers engaged in government servants, mining, construction, social and political work, teaching, trade and commerce etc.

The table 4 shows that the workers of the Buddhist community are largely involved as cultivator labourers (41.00%), Agricultural labourers (35.4%), and other workers (20.5%). One noticeable thing shown by the above table is that the Buddhist workers engaged in agricultural works (35%) are highest among all other religious communities; viz. Hindus (25.6%), Muslims (21.6%), Christians (13.1%), Sikhs (9.1%) and Christians (1.9%). Thus we can say that their participation in the primary sector is the highest.

Figure 7. Categories of Workers- Scheduled Castes and Buddhists in Census 2001



Source: State Primary Census Abstract for Individual Scheduled Caste and the First Report on Religion Data Abstract, Census of India, 2001

The other reasonable comparison of Buddhists with other communities can be with the SCs because most of the Buddhists are from this background. The figure 7 shows that total workers in Buddhist community are largely cultivating labourers (41%), and agricultural labourers (35.4%). The percentage share of scheduled castes in cultivating labourers is (39.5%), and in agricultural labourers it is (30%). In the other two sectors, HHI and others, SCs are ahead in comparison to

Buddhists. Whereas SCs workers' share in HHI and OW is 4.5% and 26%, Buddhists account for 3.1% and 20.5% respectively. The Buddhist community is largely based in primary sector especially in cultivating (41%), marginally ahead of SCs (39.5%). In this comparative study we find that the Buddhist community has upper hand in the field of cultivation and agricultural labouring, while it is lagging behind in household industry and other services.

4. Contributing Factors in Emerging Buddhist Community

4.1 Conversion of Outcastes

One thing which proves that there is surely a large conversion to Buddhism is its immense growth percentage. Table 5 highlights that whereas the total population growth rate in the five censuses has been 16.3, 19.6, 25.4, 24.5, and 25.8% respectively; Buddhist population growth rate was recorded 316.2, 235.4, 35.3, 338.4, and 44.8%. Such a high growth rate of Buddhists cannot be its internal growth rate which is calculated on the basis of high birth-rate and low mortality rate. No community is recorded in the history with such a high growth rate naturally. It is absolutely due to mass conversion drive, especially among the outcastes/scheduled castes.

Table 5. Decadal Population Growth Rate of Uttar Pradesh in % (1961-2001)

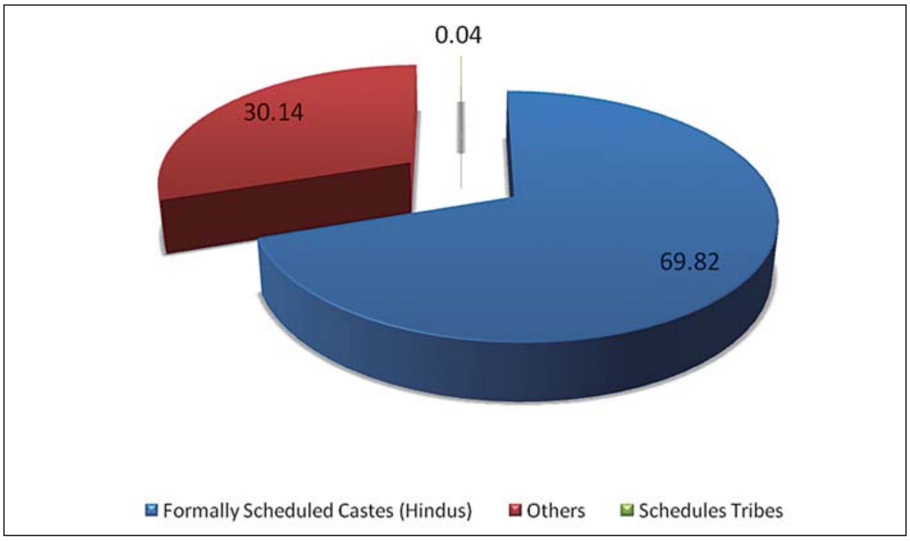
Growth in %	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Buddhists	316.28	235.42	35.35	338.4	44.80
SCs	——	——	——	——	25.23[16]
Total Population	16.38	19.67	25.40	24.56	25.84

Sources: Census of India 1951-2001

The second thing which approves the conversion as the most important factor in the highest growth rate of Buddhist community is the social composition of Buddhist demography depicted in census report of 2001. According to the Census 2001, the number of scheduled castes who follow Buddhism is 210890 out of 302031, which constitutes 69.82% population of total Buddhists of the state.

16. It is based on the Scheduled Caste population of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand jointly.

Figure 8. Social Composition of Buddhists Demography in Uttar Pradesh in % (Census 2001)



Total Number of Buddhists (UP) 2001	Buddhists formerly Hindu SCs	Other Buddhists in 2001	Scheduled Tribes
302031	210890 (*69.82%*) of total Buddhists	91034 (*30.14%*) of total Buddhists[17]	107 (0.04%) of total Buddhists

Sources: Uttar Pradesh The Data Highlights: Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Census of India 2001.

The figure 8 endorses the point that the outcastes/SCs have the biggest share in Buddhist population.[18] The data is evident of the most attractive religion amongst scheduled castes for the conversion which constitutes 0.6% of total scheduled caste population and 3.74% total Buddhist population of India.

The general report on 1961 census also mentions the conversion of scheduled castes into Buddhism as the most viable factor in its jumping growth. The report says, "The most important factor which contributed to the enhancement of the Buddhist population of the state with the stipulated growth rate of 316.28% has been phenomenal on account of a large scale conversion especially from amongst the scheduled castes of Hindus."[19] Thus, the cause of conversion of outcastes is the most important aspect in the revival of Buddhism.

4.2 The Scope of Ambedkar

The conversion call, given by Ambedkar in 1956, greatly impressed the outcastes of Uttar Pradesh, especially the Jatavs which is the largest scheduled caste community in state. The Jatavs welcomed the historic move of conversion by accepting Ambedkar as their cultural hero, and consequently organized many conversion ceremonies.

4.2.1 Culture Hero: There are several reasons for the overwhelming support to Ambedkar, in

17. 0.1% of UP Scheduled Tribes' total population or 107 persons belong to Buddhists community. See "Uttar Pradesh Data Highlights: The Scheduled Tribes", Census of India 2001. According to Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit, accessed on 01/01/2011), the 61st Round Survey of the NSSO found that the total SCs/STs population in India's Buddhist community is 89.5% and 7.4% respectively.

18. This is first time in the census of Uttar Pradesh that the figure of converted Buddhists of scheduled caste background is provided. Though this figure is not given in detailed district wise format; but overall this is a breakthrough in itself.

19. See "General Report on the Census"; census of India, Vol. XV, Uttar Pradesh, Part I-A (ii), p 128

which the first is cultural. By cultural component Lynch (1969) meant a heritage of literature, myths, art, symbols and values of Jatavs. The outcastes of Agra responded to Ambedkar's mass conversion drive in 1957 and removed the Hindu deities from 22 temples and converted them into Buddhist temples.[20] In Lucknow, Bhante Pragyanand, the successor of Bodhanand, organized several Buddhist conversion ceremonies in 1957.[21]

Initially, the Hindu untouchable community of many districts of western Uttar Pradesh (Agra, Aligarh, Meerut and Pilibhit) claimed themselves as Buddhists and began to assert Dr. Ambedkar as their cultural hero. They embraced him as their hero and that came to many as a surprise because he did not belong to the Jatav caste but was born in Mahar caste in Maharashtra state. Even though he was outsider, he was received as their 'own' hero. This thing for some sociologist is a unique incident in history of India where primordial loyalties play an important role, but in the case of Ambedkar all these things became secondary and he was accepted widely. As, Lynch (1969) describes,

> He has become the culture hero of the Jatavs, and the attention he receives borders on worship. This is at first surprising because Ambedkar was not a Jatav from Uttar Pradesh; he was, on the contrary, a Mahar from the state of Maharashtra. These two facts, different caste and different regional affiliation, might ordinarily disqualify a man for leadership in India where such primordial loyalties run deep and sharply separate one group from another.[22]

4.2.2 Commonality of Experiences: The above description of Lynch makes point more clear how Ambedkar, who is different from the U.P.'s Jatav community in terms of caste and region, has been accepted. Why did Jatavs accept Ambedkar as their ideal? The answer is 'commonality of experiences' which was the main thread connecting Ambedkar to Jatav community. Both were victims of caste hierarchy and untouchability, so they admired his ideas and methods to change their life. Lynch argues,

> Much of the impetus to the Jatavs' unusual selection of Ambedkar as their leader lies in the similarities of their life histories with his. Ambedkar's life epitomises the painful realities, knotty problems, and radical solutions which has been part of their own lives; it was, thus, easy to transcend narrower loyalties of caste and region by identifying with him….. The Jatavs feel that Ambedkar's experiences and their own are identical. Because of this they follow him and adopt his methods and ideas for overcoming their own problems.[23]

As Lynch further writes, "the outstanding reverence to Dr. Ambedkar among the Jatavs had some reasons which helped in the wide acceptance of Ambedkar as their unquestionable hero and his interpretation of Buddhism as a substantive scope for an alternative identity."[24] Buddhism gave them a ray of hope, a set of fundamental values and an ideal model of society. And as Lynch argues, "to make these a reality Jatavs have taken to political action."[25] The Jatavs initially contacted Ambedkar and sent many telegrams supporting him over Gandhi in 1930-31 during the second round table conference in which a bitter dispute arose between Gandhi and Ambedkar. The Jatavs felt Ambedkar's position was correct.

The other reason lies in Ambedkar's structural position. He was a revolutionary which has one

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20. Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability, Social Mobility and Change in a City of India* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 149.

21. Personal interview on 31 July, 2010 at Risaldar Park Baudh Vihar, Lucknow.

22. Lynch 1969, pp 130-131.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid, pp 127-128.

commonality with the Jatavs i.e. both were untouchables under the codified structure of society in Hinduism. This commonality strengthened the feelings that "he is one of our men" one who could really understand their problems and feelings as an insider and attained status of great prestige, power, and responsibility in India. The fourth reason of overwhelming support for Ambedkar by Jatavs is symbolic importance of Ambedkar. The charismatic image of Ambedkar which emerged from his glorifying deeds had a prominent influence on the Jatavs.

4.2.3 Commonality of Traditions: For Lynch (1972 & 1969), there are two prominent north Indian traditions of Jatavs- (a) religious tradition of Kabir and Ravi Das, and (b) heroic tradition of Alha and Udal. Both the traditions have fought against Hinduism and untouchability. In the struggle of religious tradition Kabir and Ravi Das rejected caste dimensions of Hinduism and their teachings are very much similar to Ambedkar's message. Both the figures of religious tradition rejected Hinduism and preached equality. Ambedkar fits in both the traditions. He continued first traditions of Kabir and Ravidas by his vehement opposition to Hinduism and caste system. He regarded Kabir as one of his Gurus along with Jyotirao Phule and Gautam Buddha. Thus as a religious reformer, like Kabir, he was easily accepted by the Jatavs. The heroic sense of similarity between Ambedkar and Jatavs is attempted to establish by the heroic work of Alha and Udal (supposedly as untouchables) who by heroic deeds helped King Parmal in his war against Prithviraj and proved that untouchables are great warriors in ***heart***, ***word***, and ***deed***. In the same way Jatavs believe that the work of Ambedkar against untouchability, his fight for education and his role as the father of Indian Constitution is similar to their traditional heroes, Alha and Udal.[26]

4.3 The Role of Socio-Political Organisations

The continuous increasing Buddhist population and its popularity among outcastes show the relevance of 'Ambedkar-Buddhism' for them. The credit of carrying the message of Ambedkar-Buddhism after Ambedkar goes to the organizations established by him like The Buddhist Society of India (Bhartiya Baudh Mahasabha or BSI) and the Republican Party of India (RPI). The BSI was registered by Dr. Ambedkar on 4th May 1955 in the office of the Registrar of Companies, Mumbai. It was very active all over India and in UP. Agra was a main city of its activities.[27] The leaders of these organizations actively participated in the conversion drive and by their efforts convinced the outcastes to embrace Ambedkar-Buddhism as their ray of hope to overcome the age-old social and mental slavery which Ambedkar hoped would come to an end after conversion.

The role of outcaste-Buddhists led political outfit, Republican Party of India (RPI), was immense in making Ambedkar-Buddhist movement widely accepted at that time. RPI demanded the extension of 'reservation facilities' to Ambedkar-Buddhists (who converted from SCs/STs) in 1960s and later on, and its leaders actively promoted outcastes to convert to Buddhism.[28] RPI is an example of the combination of dalit politics and Buddhism. Thus, the role of socio-political organisations in the promotion of Buddhists is immense. In 1980s the Dalit Panther has been a vibrant force to campaign for outcastes and Ambedkar-Buddhism through literature and public meetings.[29]

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26. Lynch, O. (1972). "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar- Myth and Charisma". in J. M. Mahar (Ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press. p107 and, Lynch 1969, pp 140-141.

27. See Fiske, A. (1972). "Scheduled Caste Buddhist Organisations". in J. M. Mahar (Ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (pp 112-142). Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, p 118.

28. Republican Party of India since a very long time was struggling for its demand for quotas for outcaste-Buddhists. See. Lynch 1969, p 104.

29. Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, 2007, p. 2181, *EPW*.

The decade of 1990s has been of great contradictions in the field of social and political stability. On one hand the Hindutva forces like Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal etc. tried to establish the social and political norms based on the Hindu ideology, while on the other hand dalit backwards led political groups such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party (SP) came as strong representatives of dalits and other backwards. Bellwinkel (2007) argues that the political discourse instigated by Sangh Parivar – the Hindu fundamentalist organisation did not have any impact and was rejected vehemently by the Ambedkar-Buddhists.

An important event in social and political history of Uttar Pradesh is the emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a political party led by scheduled caste leaders. Ilaiah (1994) argues that the goal of BSP was to break the caste system and introduce social transformation.[30] Pai (2002) argues, "BSP had a significant role in making dalits conscious towards the social change/transformation though unsuccessful in achieving it. She argues "It (BSP) has constructed a strong Dalit movement, based upon identity and consciousness, while on the other hand despite considerable politicization of Dalits in U.P in the 1980s, and 1990s, the BSP has failed in its avowed goal of displacing ***manuvadi*** (representing upper caste) forces and introducing social change."[31] Thus for her, there is only politicisation of dalits without any social change by the BSP.

4.4 Tibetan Migration

According to general reports on 1961 census,[32] other than conversion, the immigration of a large number of Tibetan Buddhists in 1959 when the Dalai Lama sought political asylum in India after the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese. This immigration was one of the most viable reasons for the emergence of Buddhist demography. Later on the migration might have continued but in the general reports of the censuses this reason is not stated. In addition to this no census reveals the number of immigrant Buddhists. The 2001 census brings out that 70% (approx.) of total number of Buddhists in Uttar Pradesh consists of outcasts. It hints that the remaining 30% (approx.) consists of Buddhists from other castes including Tibetan immigrants.

4.5 Extension of Reservation Facility

After 1991 one of the reasons for conversion to Buddhism is the extension of reservation facilities to the neo-converts as it was only for scheduled castes before conversion. The above point is vindicated by Mahendra K. Premi, as he argues, "There have been changes in the Acts on "religion" by the Parliament at various points of time; for example, ***exceptional growth of Buddhists in some states was due to many scheduled castes people converting themselves to Buddhism*** and continuing to get benefits applicable to the scheduled castes."[33] The 'extension of reservation' for Buddhists in 1991 may be a boosting factor for conversion but it is not a sole factor because the figures of previous censuses also have shown a significant increase in the number of Buddhists. If reservation is the only factor then there would not have been so high growth in Buddhism before 1991. In addition to the above reason the ideological inspirations of Ambedkar had been the main motivating factor in all the decades for the growth of Buddhism.

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30. See Ilaiah (1994), BSP and Caste as Ideology. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *29*(*12*), p 668.

31. See Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh - Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge* Vol. 3, (New Delhi: Sage, 2002), p.1.

32. See "General Report on the Census"; census of India, Vol. XV, Uttar Pradesh, Part I-A (ii), p 128.

33. See Premi Mahendra K. *Population of India, In the Millennium: Census 2001.*(New Delhi: NBT. 2006). p 167.

5. The Political Implications of Buddhists' Community

One of the available indicators of social status i.e literacy of Buddhists indicates that the community is a little ahead in terms of literacy as compared to the SCs but at the bottom among all the religious communities except Muslims. In economic field their share largely is in cultivating and agricultural labouring little ahead of SCs while SCs are much ahead in household industry, government services, mining, construction, teaching and trades etc. In-fact, there are not sufficient data available to examine their socio-economic conditions. In terms of politics the Buddhists assertion is on a high after 1990.

Table 6: Buddhists Contestants in Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections 1991-2007

Year	Total Seats	Total Contestants	Average	Buddhist Contestants			% of Buddhist Contestants
				Male	Female	Total	
1991	419	7851	—	10	03	13	0.16
1993	422	9726	23	24	01	25	0.25
1996	424	1029	02	08	00	08	0.77
2002	403	5533	14	11	03	14	0.25
2007	403	6086	15	19	04	23	0.37

Sources: Statistical Reports on General Election, 1991 - 2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Note: The identity of Buddhist contestants is derived on the basis of their surnames/last-names. Most of the Buddhists have their surnames/last names either as *Gautam* or *Baudh*. In reality, this number may be higher than this because many Buddhists have not changed their names. In Bahujan Samaj Party many Buddhist leaders contest elections without changing their names.[34]

The table above shows the participation and assertion of Buddhists in politics. Before 1991 there were hardly a couple of Buddhist contestants which grew very fast in the last decade of the 20th century. The above data speaks only about post 1990 developments because before this their participation was negligible.

The statistical reports on state assembly elections of UP does not reveal any data on religious lines though it mentions about the scheduled castes. As it is known that most of Buddhists are of scheduled caste background and even Government of India includes them within scheduled castes.

The inference drawn from the above table is folowing—

The percentage of Buddhist contestants increased to 0.37% in 2007 as compared to 0.16% in the year 1991. There was a sharp rise in the year 1996 and the percentage went up to 0.77. Most of the contestants are seen as independent candidates. In the 2007 election except independent candidates (09), BSP has the largest contestants (05).[35] The possible reason of this emerging number of Buddhists in political fray goes to the extension of scheduled castes reservation facility to Buddhists also.

In the contemporary BSP ruled state many Ambedkar-Buddhists are appointed as ministers. The policies and programme of the government are highly influenced by them. The emerging demography highly appeals BSP because most of the Buddhists are from the dalit background, the core vote bank of the party. The trend of whooping increase in Buddhist population somewhere

34. Swami Prasad Maurya, Paras Nath Maurya and Daddu Prasad are its example. Who have not added Gautam or baudh in their names. Even BSP president Mayawati do lots of rites in a Buddhist way. She performed the BSP founder Kanshiram's last funeral herself according to Buddhist rites.

35. See Statistical Reports on General Election 2007, the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

seems to have an impact on the BSP government programmes. In the name of Sakyamuni Buddha, Mayawati government has initiated lots of project. Among those the most important is Gautam Budha University in Gautam Buddha Nagar and International Buddhist Reserach Institute (IBRI) and Baud Vihar Shanti Upvan in Lucknow. In IBRI, the language of Buddhists i.e.Pali would be taught.[36] The library of the institute is situated in the ground floor of Baudh Vihar Shanti Upvan, Lucknow and the first floor has a magnificient Buddhist meditation centre. The library is established with a collection many rare Buddhist books with the help of many southeast Buddhist countries.[37]

6. Conclusion

The above study, based on the available census data, reveals that the Buddhist community is the fastest growing religious community in uttar pradesh. The conversion among outcastes (scheduled castes) is the main reason for such a high growth. The most crucial factor in this growth is Ambedkar's ideological influence on dalits through many socio-political groups and some other reasons such as extension of reservation facility to neo-Buddhists. The response to this phenomenon from dalit led political parties is unavoidable.[38] Currently, the most powerful political group BSP shows highly concerned and respondent to this group. Even the BSP leaders from backward castes seem to be very positive about Ambedkar-Buddhism as we can observe Ambedkar-Buddhist iconography in their houses and offices.[39] Though, the emerging Buddhist community in the census is a small phenomenon but it has much larger appeal and implications.

The positive social indicator of Buddhists in terms of literacy in comparison with other communities is also important aspect but is not sufficient to know the real social situation of Buddhists. Their status in other fields such as higher education and health etc also needs to be known. The available socio-economic indicators also hint at the deprivation of this community in many fields in comparison of other religions. The available economic indicators are also insufficient to arrive at any conclusion and require proper study in order to end their deprivation and inequity. To know the economic condition of this community some other crucial indicators such as per capita consumption, employment rate and availability of basic amenities are also needed.

Though, in uttar pradesh the Buddhists are expanding their appeals in political sphere but at the level of central government their appeal does not seem very strong. The role of central government seems indifferent towards this minority community which is visible in the following instances. First, the government agencies are not carrying out a study on this community. In 2005 the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) gave the data regarding socio-economic status of many religious communities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Hindus but did not spell anything about the Buddhists. The Ambedkar Foundation, which is an independent body associated with the ministry of social justice and empowerment, government of India created with the purpose of carrying forward the ideology of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar also has no programme for this community. It is not sufficient to facilitate this community like the scheduled castes

36. Personal interview with Bhikku Chandima, the Chairperson of International Buddhist Research Institute, Lucknow on 6th December, 2010 at Baudh Vihar Shanti Upvan, Lucknow.

37. Ibid.

38. Besides BSP there are many political groups such as Republican Party of India, Indian Justice Party and Ambedkar Samaj Party etc. Since the beginning RPI leaders have been involved in conversion and Buddhism. The founder president of IJP has converted himself as a Buddhist.

39. Personally I have observed Ambedkar-Buddhists icons in the houses and offices of many backward castes leaders.

because it has a different notion of its history and culture. Secondly, there are two bases of minority in India- religious and linguistic. The language of Buddhist scriptures and inscriptions is Pali but at the central government level they could not make a great force to compel the State to promote Pali language in the country.

In bahujan samaj politics of uttar pradesh, the community occupies a deep attention. There are many people who claims themselves as Buddhists and are think-tank of the BSP, have important role in policy and programme of the government.[40] Keeping cultural demand of this community in view we can see that the BSP government has developed an Ambedkar-Buddhist iconography across the state and has opened some institutions to promote Pali and Buddhist education.[41]

Overall, the community really requires much more considerations in terms of study and data to understand their developments and underdevelopments in the field of socio-economic, political and cultural fields to make policies and programmes to promote equity. Subsequently, the vibrant development of this community will facilitate in making India a real democracy and nation.

40. Many leaders of the BSP are waiting for the appropriate call of the top-most leadership for the *deeksha*. According to Mayawati's proclamation in 2003 and 2006, she will take *deeksha* with her millions of followers only after achieving the power at the centre, while all the programmes of her government will be held as per Buddhist rites. Interestingly, though she could not take *deeksha* but she has stood herself alongwith her mentor Kanshiram in the Buddhist Vihar of Lucknow, which clearly symbolizes her claim as a Buddhist.

41. In a personal interview with Prof. Mahavir Singh, Dean School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Gautam Buddha University, NOIDA on 21 July 2010, informed that all the university students will study a course on Buddhist education.

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